Popular materials are written at a level that can be read and understood by the general population. Popular materials may be written by authors who do not have specific expertise or training in the topic discussed, and the materials are often published quickly.

Scholarly materials are written at an academic level and present the findings of scholarly research. These materials often go through a "peer review process" which validates the author(s) research methods and conclusions. To determine if an item would be considered scholarly, look for the following characteristics:

* Length: The article is usually several pages long, and can be more than 20 pages.
* Author(s): The article will always list an author or group of authors. Affiliations and credentials are often listed for each.
* Audience: The intended audience includes students, researchers, and experts in the field.
* Refereed: Research is reviewed by peers prior to being accepted for publication.
* Illustrations: The article may include maps, tables, and graphs that support the text. Colorful photographs are rarely used.
* References: The article will always include citations to research discussed throughout the article in the form of footnotes, end notes, and bibliographies.
* Language: The article will be written using vocabulary used in the author's field or discipline.
* Format: The article will follow a standard format.